



RSVP Connections

Connecting Senior Volunteers with Community Needs

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You have probably experienced a time in life when you couldn't drive your car, but needed to get someplace. Perhaps you broke an arm, had surgery, or were taking a medication that made you dizzy. Perhaps your car was simply in the repair shop. You suddenly needed someone else to drive, or to bring you essentials such as groceries or medications. Perhaps you lived in a place where you could not get to a bus. Perhaps a family member would have to miss work in order to bring you to a medical appointment. Now, consider the impact on your life if the need for help with transportation lasted for months or years...

Today, 105 Million Americans can be considered "transportation disadvantaged." They cannot drive themselves or cannot afford to meet the cost of their own transportation. At some point, nearly all our country's 44 million elders rely on others to drive them to nutrition, medical and social services. This is especially true of those in the 85+ age group, who are more likely to have health and mobility conditions that affect their ability to drive, and result in a greater need for transportation assistance and support. In addition, many of the 46 million Americans with disabilities rely on transportation services to access jobs, health care and other daily living activities. Almost 38 million Americans living in poverty do not have their own reliable transportation and 10.6 million households--a quarter of which are in rural areas--do not even have an automobile.

All of these individuals need transportation for a variety of purposes, at a variety of times, to get to a variety of places—rides that enhance quality of life, rides to remain in the community, and rides that are “user friendly.” And, they need to be able to afford their rides and to have some control over when and how. Public transit and paratransit systems can meet only some of this need. Non-profit and government agencies find it difficult or impossible to meet the rising costs of providing van or taxi transportation for their elderly, disabled, or low-income clients. For example, cuts to the 2005 budget for the Erie County Dept. of Senior Services “Going Places” van transportation program resulted in the loss of almost all low-cost van transportation for seniors in the City of Buffalo.

Through a number of community programs, volunteers are stepping forward and into their own cars or agency-provided vans to help meet the need for transportation. Their riders may be seniors or persons with disabilities. Drivers may transport meals for homebound elders or blood supplies for hospitals. Volunteers in these programs are linking people with social and nutrition services, assuring people access to basic health care, and more. In short, volunteer drivers are a lifeline to society for those that they serve.

Pat Dowling
RSVP Coordinator

Happy New Year to All! From All of us at RSVP

The Need for Volunteer Drivers Continues to Grow—Ways To Help

Rural Transit

Each week, Jim Montgomery climbs into a van bearing the words “Rural Transit Service, Inc.” to travel the winding and hilly roads to neighbors waiting for him around the towns of Holland and Sardinia. He may bring them to a medical appointment, a grocery store, or to visit a spouse in a nursing home. Jim knows that these elderly, disabled or low-income neighbors would probably not be able to get to their destinations if not for him and the van he is driving. He also knows that many of his riders have been isolated in their homes for most of the week, and are looking forward to chatting with him and the other riders.

Almost 3/4 of those over age 65 live in suburban or rural settings, places where transit and para-transit options are limited as impractical or costly. A national report titled “*Aging Americans: Stranded without Options*”, found that more than a fifth of people age 65 and older do not drive, and half of these stay home on any given day. In rural areas the rate is even higher. As rural areas continue to lose travel options and basic community services, transportation access for rural special needs groups will grow as an unmet need.

Rural Transit Service, Inc. provides 18,000 rides per year in the towns and villages of Aurora, Boston, Brant, Clarence, Colden, Collins, Concord, Eden, Elma, Evans, Gowanda, Holland, Marilla, Newstead, North Collins, Orchard Park, Sardinia, and Wales. Rural Transit has few paid staff members—two full-time and three part-time staff. The agency relies almost exclusively on a small army of approximately 140 volunteers who drive the vans, volunteers who dispatch the vans, and volunteers who “ride shotgun” on the vans to assist the driver and riders as needed. RSVP volunteer Betty Beeny (pictured here) dispatches the Rural Transit vans based in the Orchard Park Senior Center. “I was a driver on the vans from 1999-2002. When I



stopped driving for health reasons, I was still interested in helping in the program. Because I was a driver for so long, I can explain the best routes to the drivers.”

Brenda Henderson, Executive Director of Rural Transit notes that there is a constant need for more volunteers, because there is a continuous need for more transportation. “The more volunteers, the more service that can be provided,” she said. Rural Transit’s first priority is medical appointments, and then it is first come, first served. “The riders are understanding about that. They even try to help out. If several neighbors on a

street or in one apartment building need rides to go shopping, then they’ll all try to do it on the same day. They also understand that the drivers are volunteers, and they appreciate that they are giving up their time in their retirement.”

Volunteers come to Rural Transit in different ways. Betty Beeny had been a school bus driver for 27 years, mostly transporting handicapped children. “I missed it, because I like to meet new people,” she said. When Betty and her husband moved into an apartment in Orchard Park, she felt right at home because she already knew several of her neighbors who were riders on her Rural Transit van. Jim Montgomery first heard about Rural Transit from his friend, Clint Salmon, who is a Rural Transit volunteer. “Clint kept asking me when I was going to retire so that I could become a volunteer too.” Both of the volunteers are firmly committed to the mission of Rural Transit. “It’s not a hard job, and I meet all kinds of people,” said Jim. “I just hope that someday when I need it, someone will be there to drive me around.”



The American Cancer Society

When a patient receives a diagnosis of cancer, suddenly there are so many things for both the patient and their family to think about and decisions to make. There are a deluge of appointments to keep track of --medical appointments, surgeries, chemotherapy or radiation treatments, and others --along with the question “How do I get there?” Patients may be able to drive themselves to a treatment session, but may expect that they won’t be able to safely drive home afterwards.

Volunteers in the Road to Recovery program of the American Cancer Society (ACS) are working to ease this dilemma for cancer patients. Road to Recovery volunteers transport patients receiving cancer treatments from their homes to the treatment site. Drivers use their own personal vehicles, and specify the geographic area that they are willing to drive. Volunteers may drive patients to treatment sites both in the City of Buffalo and in the suburbs. Drivers are needed all over Western New York, although there is an even greater need now in the City of Buffalo because of the loss of the Going Places Program. Nancy Hanavan, Director of Patient & Family Services for ACS, says that generally the same volunteer will bring the patient to the treatment site and back home again.

RSVP volunteer Anne Koberstein has been a Road to Recovery driver for over 12 years. (Incidentally, she also coordinates Food Shuttle volunteers in the North Buffalo/ Ken-Ton area.) Anne volunteers weekly, bringing patients to Kenmore Mercy Hospital, Roswell, and other treatment sites. She calls the scheduled patient a few days before to introduce herself, and to check her directions. While she is waiting for her rider to finish a treatment session, she may read a book and have a cup of coffee. "It's certainly no hardship for me, and the patients are so very appreciative for the ride."

"Programs and services for elderly and disabled won't do any good if they can't get there."

Ironically, Anne had been driving for the Road to Recovery program for a few years when she was herself diagnosed with cancer, and went through a series of radiation treatments. "My own experience helped me to relate even more to what the patients were going through," she observed. "I don't always tell them about my own experience. When it is appropriate, and I share my story, then it often seems to cheer them to know that I am a survivor and doing well."

Anne was given special recognition at an ACS luncheon event as the Road to Recovery volunteer with the most years of service. She intends to continue her weekly routes for a long time to come. "People are so grateful for this service. I would hate to lose that. It's so little, and it cheers them so much."

MORE OPPORTUNITIES TO VOLUNTEER "ON WHEELS":

Home delivered meal programs: There are several different programs throughout Erie County, but all of them need drivers and servers to bring two nutritious meals (one hot and one cold meal) at around noon to homebound elderly and disabled people:

Meals on Wheels of Buffalo & Erie County

Amherst Meals on Wheels

Ken-Ton Meals on Wheels

Southtowns Meals on Wheels (serving Boston, Colden, Concord, Holland, and Sardinia)

Veterans Administration Medical Center DAV Transportation Program: Drivers transport veterans to medical appointments at the VA, driving vans supplied by the DAV and other service groups.

Food Shuttle. Drivers use their own vehicles on a scheduled route to bring donated and surplus food items from local grocery stores to various agencies that serve people in need.

American Red Cross Blood Transportation Program. Drivers transport vital blood supplies from the six local donation centers to the West Henrietta facility for testing and processing. Drivers have the option of using their own vehicles or an American Red Cross vehicle, and can volunteer for as little as 2 hours and up to 6 hours per shift.

Independent Living Center. Volunteers needed to drive adults with developmental disabilities to social and recreational programs in order to reduce their risk of isolation. Drivers use their own cars, and may transport the adult to a local restaurant, a movie theatre, the mall, or to some other site.

Richard Kloc: A VOLUNTEER TRANSPORTATION CHAMPION

“Veterans helping veterans.” These words are repeated almost every time you ask a VA volunteer about their service. RSVP volunteer Dick Kloc, who is the man behind the success of the DAV van transportation program, adds the following: “Our fellow veterans have given their arms, their legs, and sometimes their lives. The closest that any of us can do to thank them is to do whatever we can to make sure that they get to where they need to go.”

It is this commitment to helping fellow veterans that brings Dick to the VA 5 days a week, from 5 AM to 2 PM. Dick juggles all logistics involved in keeping DAV vans on the road to bring veterans to medical appointments at the VA--from scheduling riders, to gaining funding for more vans, to recruiting and training new volunteers. (Every DAV van driver and dispatcher is a volunteer.) “There is a pressing need for more volunteers,” he said. “We currently bring between 20 and 30 veterans to the medical center each day. If we had more volunteers, we could bring even more.”

Dick Kloc, a Vietnam veteran, gave 1,877 hours of service last year making sure that other veterans would have a ride to the VA. This was the highest number of hours by an RSVP volunteer in the time period July 2004 – June 2005, and is almost as many hours as a full-time job! Dick explained, “When I take a job, I want to make sure that it is done well.”

Thanks to Dick Kloc for his commitment to America’s veterans and to this important transportation service!

LEARNING (AND TEACHING) FOR THE FUN OF IT!

This Fall, a class of students attentively listened to Prof. Paul Reitan’s discourse on the philosophical foundations behind policies affecting the natural environment. Prof. Virginia Figura’s class looked at ways in which an understanding of geography leads to a better understanding of phenomena from the diffusion of disease to global warming. You might be picturing lecture halls at UB, Buffalo State College, Canisius College, Niagara University, or one of our other great institutions of learning. But these classes were at two local senior centers, where the students were all over the age of 60, and the instructors were RSVP volunteers.

The “debut” semester of the Lifelong Learning Program received a round of applause both from the students and the two instructors. Students enjoyed the opportunity to learn for the sheer pleasure of it, without the pressure of tests and degree requirements. The Lifelong Learning pro-



ject was a collaborative effort of RSVP, the Lifelong Learning office of UB's Millard Fillmore College, the Orchard Park Senior Center, and the Town of Tonawanda Senior Center.

The most important ingredient in the success of the first semester was the instructors' enthusiasm for teaching, and especially their knowledge and passion for their subjects. Many thanks for our two "pioneer" RSVP Lifelong Learning instructors: Paul Reitan, who taught the course "Sustainability: Threats to the Future and Where Solutions may be Found" at the Town of Tonawanda Senior Center, and Virginia Figura, who taught the course "Why Geography Matters in a Global Society at the Orchard Park Senior Center". Paul Reitan is Professor Emeritus, Dept. of Geology at SUNY-UB. Virginia Figura is Adjunct Professor in the Dept. of Geography and Planning at Buffalo State College.

The dream of the Lifelong Learning committee is to increase opportunities for continued learning for people over 60. We want to add more courses and more senior centers—and most importantly, more volunteer instructors with a passion for teaching others. If you, or someone you know, would be interested in becoming part of the future of the Lifelong Learning program, please call the RSVP office at 858-7548.

LIKE TO GIVE ADVICE? FULL OF GOOD IDEAS?

Are you an RSVP volunteer who:

- Is really committed to the value of volunteering?
- Has creative ideas about directions for volunteer programs?
- Has new ideas for ways to let others know about the exciting volunteer roles available in our community?
- Would be interested in helping out with planning and organizing a really big party (such as the annual Tribute Day luncheon)?
- Doesn't mind voicing an opinion, and is always interested in listening to the ideas of others too?



We'd like to speak with you! The RSVP Advisory Council has several vacancies. The Council is especially interested in candidates for these vacancies who currently are RSVP volunteers, so that the perspective of the volunteers is always strongly represented on the Council.



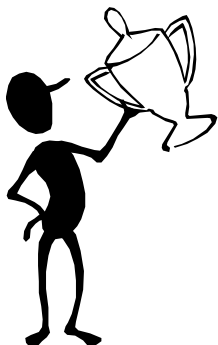
Come and look us over! If you're at all curious about the Advisory Council, call the RSVP office at 858-7548. We'll tell you the dates of upcoming meetings. Join us at the meeting to see what the Council does. We welcome your ideas, your energy, and your commitment to RSVP!

WELCOME NEW RSVP VOLUNTEERS...WE'RE GLAD YOU JOINED US

American Red Cross – Christa Bihler, Francis Kolnacki, Martha Muller; **Amherst Senior Center** – Daniel Brown, Mary Cadenhead, Kokila Chheda, Delores Griffis, Carolyn Grossman, Mary Hartwick, Dolores Holm, Ellen Hooven, Gwen Joseph, Margaret Mitschow, Carol Nunes, Arlene Puchalski, Bronislaus Puchalski, Rita Schumann; **Autumnwood Senior Center** – Patricia Bartolone; **Baptist Manor** – Loretta Tiffany; **Beaver Meadow** – Harry Henshaw; **Bertrand Chaffee Hospital** – Marion Igel; **Boston Nutrition** – Joyce Jensen; **B&EC Botanical Gardens** – Alphonse Marabella, Mary Fran Schneckenberger; **B&EC Meals on Wheels** – Sally Denesha, Janet Derk; **Buffalo General Hospital** – Norman Brzezniak; **Cephas** – Louise Koenig; **Clarence Senior Center** – Gail Horan, Dolores Michalski, Florine Young; **Darwin Martin House** – Judith Colby; **Erie County Home** – Marlene A. Smith; **Food Shuttle** – Margaret Kalinowski, Mary Lou Sailer; **Grand Island Golden Age Center** – Shirley Killian; **Habitat for Humanity** – Nancy Fagan, William Sullivan; **HIICAP** – Marge Callahan, Dorothy Kruczynski, Susan Poodry, David Trumpfheller; **Lifelong Learning** – Paul Reitan, Virginia Figura; **Literacy Volunteers** – Anne Gayley, Mary Kowalczyk; **Lovejoy Caregivers** – Kristina Mazurek, Rose Panfil; **Maple East** – William Prudden; **Operation Good Neighbor** – Linda Walsh; **Response to Love** – Mitzi Fuller, Ann Jablonicky, Suzanne Lewis, Kathleen Majchrzak, Theresa McCarthy, Dennis Shea; **Rural Transit** – Carol Jenney, Joan Wittmeyer; **Saint Vincent de Paul** – David Daigler; **Salvation Army** – Mildred Toner; **Sisters Hospital** – Mary Cullen; **Town of Evans Senior Center** – Mary Jost, Eleanor Kelm; **Veteran's Administration** – Kenneth Caiola, Esther Cherry, Thomas Doerfler, Gary McKee, Jean Williams; **Weinberg Campus** – Marian Dranger, Isabelle Mankoff, Sabina May, Colleen Oelkers; **West Seneca Senior Center** – Marcella Penkalski; **WNED** – Mary Ann Baran, Patricia Glendinning

RSVP STRIKES GOLD

and we found a fortune in our newest staff member, Gail Chapman! Gail joined the RSVP staff to coordinate the volunteers for the Senior Services' Health Insurance Information & Counseling Program (see article below). Gail previously worked for many years as the Coordinator of Volunteer Training & Development and Customer Service at Erie County Medical Center. She also served on the RSVP Advisory Council, and chaired the Recognition Committee. Gail retired from ECMC in May after 37 years of employment with Erie County. When HIICAP needed someone to recruit and to work directly with volunteers, Gail was a perfect fit. Gail is happy to be with RSVP and especially back to working with volunteers---and we're very happy she's here!



PRESIDENTIAL SERVICE AWARDS

Congratulations to you all—560 RSVP Volunteers earned Presidential Service Awards for giving 100 or more hours of service during the past year! Special congratulations to the 11 volunteers who this year join the elite group receiving the Call to Service Award for more than 4,000 hours of service: Victor Carlucci, Elizabeth Cash, Patricia Ciminelli, Mary Haas, Helen, Lownie, Ruth Muscarella, Betty Pigut, Veli Scilingo, Harold Witt, Shirley Wrenn, and Frances Zalewski. You are an inspiration to the community!

PIECING TOGETHER THE PUZZLE OF PART D

You've heard about it. It's all over the newspapers, television and radio, even on the signs outside of pharmacies. Described by some as "bewildering", "confusing", "complex". It's the new Medicare Prescription Benefit, also known as Medicare Part D, and it's causing quite a stir!

Erie County Senior Services is at the forefront in helping seniors and their families understand the costs and benefits of the new benefit through the Department's Health Insurance Information, Counseling, and Assistance Program "HIICAP". HIICAP coordinator and "insurance guru" Bill Daniels and other staff members have been flooded with requests for presentations about the new benefit, and with phone calls from people with questions about the benefit.

In order to help meet this tremendous need for information about Medicare Part D, the HIICAP program also has a group of specially trained RSVP volunteers. These volunteers not only assist at community presentations, but they will answer phone calls in the HIICAP office at the Rath Building and meet on a one-to-one basis with seniors at a number of local senior centers. Volunteers are supplied with laptop computers so they can assist seniors to enroll on-line. HIICAP volunteers provide information so seniors can make an educated and informed decision about their health care options. They do not select a specific Medicare plan for the senior.

More HIICAP volunteers are urgently needed! Volunteers complete extensive training, including seminars, shadowing staff and "veteran" volunteers, and ongoing updates about changes in the benefit. For more information about becoming a HIICAP volunteer, contact Gail Chapman, RSVP's HIICAP volunteer coordinator at 858-6796. If you or anyone you know needs assistance with understanding the Medicare Part D benefit, call the Erie County Dept. of Senior Services at 858-8526



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